Building Capacity and Enhancing Engagement
– Innovative Approach at The Scarborough Hospital

.

Rhonda Lewis
Vice President, Human Resources & Patient Relations
The Scarborough Hospital
Scarborough, Ontario, Canada

Situated in one of the most diverse communities in Canada, The Scarborough Hospital (TSH) consists of two hospital campuses and six satellite sites. TSH is a regional centre for dialysis and is renowned for its mental health, orthopaedic surgery, maternal newborn, paediatrics, chronic disease and cancer care programs. Affiliated with the University of Toronto, TSH is also a referral centre for vascular surgery, pacemakers and cataract surgery. TSH's workforce consists of around 3200 employees, 700 physicians and 500 volunteers.

Abstract – **TSH's proactive approach towards building employee capacity and enhancing engagement as it prepares to address imminent transformational workforce shift in the health care sector, is embodied in its innovative Code Career program. A discussion of the unique components will highlight the pioneering journey that the organization embarked upon towards achieving its goals of attracting, engaging and retaining high-performing employees. It is a well-researched fact that the opportunity for career development and progression is a key driver of employee attraction and engagement. Capacity must be built internally and externally through short-term and long-term plans, on a system as well as localized basis. Value propositions must inspire and endear in order to attract and engage. Actions must speak louder than words. All of these concepts come visibly and vibrantly alive in the novel and leading-edge Code Career program – establishing the organization firmly as an innovative leader committed to building employee capacity and enhancing employee engagement.**

Keywords – capacity; engagement; career; development; employee; framework; model

I.   INTRODUCTION

What does the phrase 'optimal employee attraction and engagement' actually mean in today's world? Is it a well-worn human resources cliché, or is it an over-used corporate mantra?   At The Scarborough Hospital (TSH), this phrase is the cornerstone of its people strategy where each word is espoused through its literal meaning - providing the impetus for the launch of a first-of-its-kind career development program among hospitals in the Canadian province of Ontario. This paper highlights the value of focusing on career development as a means of building employee capacity and enhancing engagement.

Employees are the backbone of any organization – more so in the compassionate and caring milieu of health care. Passion for your career is the main ingredient to success in this overly empathetic environment. But how is this passion for a health care career created, nurtured and sustained in an employment market that offers hundreds of competing career options? Additionally, how do you attract employees – let alone keep them engaged – within a public sector job market fraught with funding challenges, legislative constraints, the highest job-related stress, and shortage of skilled professionals? TSH's innovative initiative – *Code Career* – set out to address this dilemma.

Through creative and thoughtful branding of the initiative, and appropriate title alignment with contingency codes used by Hospitals in Ontario to address emergency situations that may arise, it was fitting that *Code Career* should be introduced, and also financially supported, to focus on the hospital's most valuable exigency – its employees.

"In 2014, the workplace will see a power shift. As the economy improves and key skills remain in short supply, top talent employees will begin to exert control, making attraction, retention, and engagement key priorities for employers."[1][1]. Information gleaned from the well-researched books, *Conscious*

---

[1] Josh Bersin, *The Year of the Employee: Predictions For Talent, Leadership, And HR Technology In 2014,* Forbes, December 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/joshbersin/2013/12/19/ten-predictions-for-talent-leadership-and-hr-technology-in-2014.

Capitalism[2] [2] and *Firms of Endearment*[3] [3] indicate that organizations that "endear" are those that "endure."

II.   HOW CAREER DEVELOPMENT CAN BUILD CAPACITY AND ENHANCE ENGAGEMENT – LITERATURE-BASED OVERVIEW

How do you build capacity in an ever-dynamic work environment? Studies indicate that you can do so by not only developing the skills, knowledge and capability of current employees to facilitate effective functioning in the workplace, but, more importantly, by ensuring that an organization is able to successfully attract qualified employees to adequately meet its labour demand by creating an enhanced recruitment base.

Employee engagement, on the other hand, involves the delivery of discretionary effort. What drives an employee to go above and beyond the narrow confines of the job? A high level of employee engagement translates to increased productivity and maximizes organizational results. "Engaged employees have strong emotional, rational and behavioural attachments to their job and their organization. They experience pride, values congruence, and job and organizational satisfaction, and they feel enthusiastic and inspired in their work. In short, the engaged employee is the ideal employee."[4][4].

Research-based evidence demonstrates that while career development is no magic bullet for the challenges inherent in building capacity and enhancing engagement, it can make a significant contribution to meeting the challenges. Career development opportunities also create an effective link between building capacity and enhancing engagement.

A study conducted by Right Management in 2010 [5] involving more than 28,000 employees in 10 business sectors and 15 countries worldwide, found that organizations providing career development opportunities are:

- 6 times more likely to engage their employees than organizations that do not;
- Better than 4 times less likely to lose talent in the next year than organizations that do not;
- Almost 2.5 times more likely to be productive than organizations that do not.

The findings also show that career development drives engagement, which, in turn, drives retention and productivity.

In another survey launched in 2010 by Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions [6], involving a detailed examination of 244 Canadian companies and their approaches and attitudes towards career management, the findings demonstrate that there is a high awareness of the value and benefits of career management programs.

- 92% of respondents agreed that career development drives employee engagement and retention;
- 83% agreed that career management plays a critical role in the achievement of business objectives;
- 80% acknowledged that a lack of career development opportunities was the primary reason for voluntary employee departures;
- Just over 50% of organizations admitted it is now much harder for their employees to navigate their careers internally.

Yet another study by Towers Watson [7] on employee engagement and the transformation of the health care industry indicates that health care providers are poised to experience tremendous change in the next decade, and thriving in the midst of this change will require a highly engaged, high-performing workforce. The ability to develop and deploy new skills remains highly valued by the workforce and is a potent engagement factor. This doesn't only mean career advancement in the traditional sense of movement up an organization's hierarchy; it also entails the ability to expand one's portfolio of skills and diversity of experiences.[5]

Literature reveals various theories or models of individual and/or organizational career development, which are highly academic in nature.. Most of the individual models focus on the micro level of self-evaluation and exploration of career options, while

---

[2] John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia, *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*, Harvard Business Review Press, 2013, http://www.amazon.com/ Conscious-Capitalism-Liberating-Heroic-Business/dp/1422144208.

[3] Rajendra Sisodia, David B. Wolfe, and Jagdish N. Sheth, *Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose*, Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007, http://www.amazon.com/Firms-Endearment-World-Class-Companies-Passion/ dp/0131873725.

[4] Graham Lowe, *How Employee Engagement Matters for Hospital Performance*, Healthcare Quarterly Vol.15 No.2 2012, http://www.grahamlowe.ca/documents/274/HQ_vol15_no2_Lowe.pdf

[5] Max Caldwell, *Employee Engagement and the Transformation of the Health Care Industry*, Towers Watson, www.towerswatson.com

organizational models focus on the alignment between organizational competencies and individual competencies. However, with the transformational shift being seen in today's work environment, particularly in the health care industry, the practical need to be creative and move away from traditional and outdated models and theories has never been more significant. The reality is that top talent employees are starting to exert influence, making it all the more important for organizations today to dedicate time and resources to building capacity and enhancing engagement.

III. TSH CAREER DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

TSH's unique *Code Career* framework (Figure 1) was developed to address the need to build capacity and enhance engagement in a practical and appealing manner. It is based on recent studies that validate that an organization's focus on career development drives employee engagement.

Figure 1: Code Career Framework at TSH

TSH's proactive approach as it maximizes its readiness for transformational workforce shift is inherent in its broader integrated Talent Management Model, developed specifically to engage employees through its endearing *I-Care* pillars – *I*nspiring, *C*ultivating, *A*ligning, *R*ewarding and *E*valuating Talent (Figure 2). These pillars are strategically linked with the organization's Core *I-Care* Values which represent the cornerstones of its corporate culture – *I*ntegrity, *C*ompassion, *A*ccountability, *R*espect, *E*xcellence.

The significance of the title must be noted. Hospitals in Ontario use various contingency codes to address emergency situations that may arise. It was fitting that *Code Career* should be introduced, and also financially supported, to focus on the hospital's most valuable exigency – its employees.

The components of the *Code Career* framework consist of three key areas of focus that are directed towards current employees and future employees, with the ultimate goals of building employee capacity and increasing employee engagement. These goals are intrinsically linked to each other, but extrinsically may be achieved through exclusive drivers. A discussion of the three components below will highlight the pioneering journey that TSH embarked upon towards achieving its goals.

A. Fostering an Enhanced Recruitment Base by Inspiring Interest and Instilling Passion

TSH is focusing its efforts on today's high school students, who are tomorrow's potential workforce. By launching an innovative program - #careercruze - this highly progressive and reformist group is provided with early education and exposure to the multiple career options in health care. This novel initiative spans all four years of high school. Students are guided through the many facets of health care careers and provided with an opportunity to

Figure 2: Talent Management Model at TSH

match their current interests with a potential career or perhaps discover a new path. Under close supervision by professional staff, the students participate in one of various scenarios, which lead them through different departments within the hospital. At each stop, staff members showcase how they support patient care, as well as the educational path they took to attain their current role. As a result, students are enabled to make informed career choices and, are hopefully instilled with an interest in pursuing a career in health care. In addition, the main criterion for participation is that students must be family members of existing employees – thus creating an effective link to employee engagement. Therefore, the strategy behind this initiative is two-pronged.

Another equally creative venture - #volunteercruze - was launched as a complementary aspect of the #careercruze initiative. Designed to ignite the passion of volunteering in students while at the same time sustaining their interest in health care careers, #volunteercruze is specifically structured to offer students the opportunity to complete their mandatory high school volunteer service requirement – something that they currently find difficult to do due to lack of coordinated career-oriented programs. Through this process, students spend 10 hours a year for each of their four high school years, directly observing the roles of professionals working in the hospital, while learning the basic values of volunteering.

The benefits of these programs are undeniable, both in terms of building capacity and enhancing engagement. The first year of this initiative has generated immense positive responses from both students and employees – reinforcing its outstanding strategic value. Feedback included comments from students that expressed their excitement with the unique exposure they were provided to the various health care careers and the absolute value to them. On the other hand, the compliments that flowed from employees were filled with sentiments of gratitude and appreciation that their employer cared enough to implement these "awesome" programs.

Significant benefits of these two initiatives include:

- Greater awareness among students of health care career opportunities.
- Potential increased student enrolment into health care programs, thus increasing system capacity.
- Creating an ongoing pipeline of new employee

talent to support workforce planning needs.
- Increased possibility of recruiting future employees and volunteers with knowledge of TSH.
- Enhanced employee engagement fuelled through the creation of career opportunities for their family members
- A valuable form of Corporate Social Responsibility

B. Enabling Career Development by Defining Career Pathways

TSH fundamentally believes in promoting and facilitating life-long learning among its employees. This belief has now been taken one step further by including future employees into its career development strategy through the creation and launch of a ground-breaking Career Compass guidebook (Figure 3) that provides comprehensive details on career pathways in hospitals. The aim is to help guide both current and future employees in realizing their vision and reaching their career goals. Career Compass offers roadmaps for specific roles, useful resources for short and long-term planning, and a list of possible sources for funding. It highlights the multiplicity of career opportunities available in health care – from clinical to administrative to support service – and identifies the uniqueness and importance of each role in contributing to the hospital's mission to provide outstanding patient care.

This unique resource has not only been lauded by current employees and future employees, it has also been pursued by other hospitals in the province and acknowledged as a leading practice. It has filled a huge existing gap and is anticipated to make a significant difference with not only attracting and

Figure 3 – Sample of Career Compass Pathway

retaining talent, but also contributing to the advancement of current employees through the development and deployment of new skills, competencies and knowledge – eventually maximizing the building of capacity within the workforce.

The Career Compass resource offers exhaustive roadmaps for employees to kick-start their career progression, often triggered through the annual performance review and development plan process. In addition, a well-defined Learning Strategy demonstrates TSH's absolute commitment to ongoing and lifelong learning with the ultimate goal of facilitating career advancement and professional growth.

C. Creating an Ongoing Leadership Pipeline

The development of a robust Succession Management structure, focused on Realizing Internal Succession Excellence, aptly closes the circle of components that comprise the *Code Career* framework. It not only provides purposeful, strategic planning for leadership needs, but also ensures that there is a pool of high potential leaders across the organization to fill leadership gaps when required. It is a comprehensive process that identifies successors and develops them. Essentially, it provides continuity in the leadership pipeline and develops a deeper capacity for achieving results. It complements and drives the organization's future vision and fosters the retention of key talent within the organization, thereby enhancing engagement.

TSH's Succession Management structure establishes formal leadership development programs for employees identified as having high potential and readiness for an expanded role, including opportunities to augment leadership experience internally as well as externally. These include mentorship programs, job rotations, stretch assignments, and secondment prospects.

An Ontario Hospital Association survey found that approximately 40% of hospital executives are eligible now for retirement, and within the next five years this number will increase to nearly two-thirds. Therefore, there is a need to strategically align succession management and leadership development in a formal process that is standardized across the organization and which links experiences with expected learning and developmental outcomes[6][8].

The *Code Career* framework recognizes this great need and encompasses measures to mitigate potential resultant risks, thereby demonstrating its visionary approach towards building capacity and enhancing engagement.

IV. VALIDATION OF THE TSH MODEL

It is a well-known fact, based on literature, that career development is a catalyst for increasing employee engagement and one of the most important enablers is demonstrating that an organization is interested in employees' career growth and development. Employees need to understand that there is room to grow within the organization, and that efforts will be made to facilitate that career growth. Through its *Code Career* framework, TSH set about putting in place a defined process to establish and manage employee career plans that align their strengths and interests with their career goals and opportunities within the organization, thus building the Hospital's positive reputation as a place where people can grow professionally.

While the TSH model is still in its initial phase of implementation, early results based on widespread employee engagement surveys are very encouraging (Figure 4)[9]. Overall employee engagement jumped 12.7% between 2010 and 2013 when TSH initiated preliminary aspects of its model. At the same time, employee engagement related to career development jumped 8.2%. In addition, TSH's results moved from a position below the Ontario average to surpassing the provincial average. It is anticipated that the 2014 results will move the marker even higher.

---

[6] Ontario Hospital Association, *Succession Planning Resource Guide*: 2013
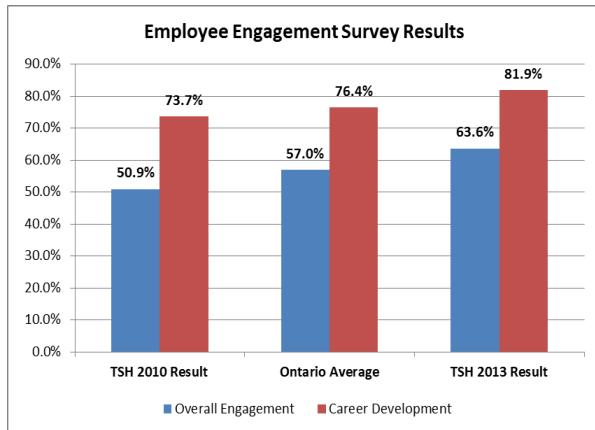
Figure 4: Validation of Code Career Framework

The main distinction between the TSH model and common literature-based models is that the *Code Career* model is very practical in its approach. It is geared towards fostering the natural emotional, rational and behavioural attachments that employees have to their job and their organization by aligning individual values with organizational values. It is flexible and can be tailored to individual and organizational needs, and seeks to prepare both employees and the organization for transformational shifts in the work environment. Similar to literature-based models, the TSH model aligns organizational competencies with individual competencies at a philosophical level. However, it goes further by focusing on sociological and psychological aspects that drive employee engagement and promote capacity building.

V. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the opportunity for career development and progression is a key organizational driver of employee attraction and engagement. The complexity of the health care industry – particularly the hospital sector – is magnified by the dynamics that are inherent in a universal health care system. It is also well-known that the health care workforce will see a transformational shift over the next decade, making it difficult to attract, engage and retain high-performing employees. The proactive and unique approach outlined in this paper puts health care organizations in the driver's seat in the war for talent. Capacity must be built internally and externally through short-term and long-term plans, on a system as well as localized basis. Value propositions must inspire and endear in order to attract and engage.

Actions must speak louder than words. All of these concepts come visibly and vibrantly alive in TSH's novel and leading-edge *Code Career* program – establishing the organization firmly as an innovative leader committed to building employee capacity and enhancing employee engagement.

REFERENCES

[1] Josh Bersin, "The Year of the Employee: Predictions For Talent, Leadership, And HR Technology In 2014," Forbes, December 2013.

[2] John Mackey and Rajendra Sisodia, "Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business," Harvard Business Review Press, 2013.

[3] Rajendra Sisodia, David B. Wolfe, and Jagdish N. Sheth, "Firms of Endearment: How World-Class Companies Profit from Passion and Purpose," Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

[4] Graham Lowe "How Employee Engagement Matters for Hospital Performance," Healthcare Quarterly Vol.15 No.2 2012.

[5] Melvin Scales, "Developing Talent: How Career Opportunities Drive Business Performance," The Linkage Leader, Right Management.

[6] Sandra Boyd and Kim Spurgeon, "Engaged Employees and the Bottom Line: Strong Career Management drives Business Results." Knightsbridge Whitepaper.

[7] Max Caldwell, "Employee Engagement and the Transformation of the Health Care Industry," Towers Watson.

[8] Ontario Hospital Association, "Succession Planning Resource Guide: 2013"

[9] The Scarborough Hospital, "Employee Opinion Survey Results," 2010 and 2013.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Rhonda Lewis is a senior Human Resources executive with extensive strategic, policy and operational experience within international private and public sector environments. She is an innovative and proactive leader, coach and mentor, with solid skills in change management and integrative systems thinking. She has been appointed to several speaking engagements and has chaired panels across Canada on topics such as workforce planning, recruitment and retention, and employer branding. In addition to holding degrees in economics and law, Rhonda is a Certified Human Resources Leader (CHRL) and one of the first professionals in Canada to be conferred with the Certified Human Resources Executive (CHRE) designation.